CLAIMS

1.   A method of selecting a test system in a distributed network environment, comprising the steps of:

determining, at a management server, a target test system description, the target test system description associated with a software test;

comparing, at the management server, the target test system description to a test system descriptions list;

selecting a test system description from the test system descriptions list that matches the target test system description; and

contacting a selected test system, the selected test system associated with the selected test system description.

2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving, at the management server, the software test associated with the target test system description.

3.   The method of claim 2 further comprising:

forwarding, from the management server, the software test, to the selected test system; and

executing the software test at the selected test system.

4.   The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving at the management server, a test system description, the test system description associated with a functioning system in the distributed network environment.

5.   The method of claim 4 further comprising:

comparing the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

6.   The method of claim 4 further comprising:

adding the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

7.   The method of claim 4 further comprising:

communicating with the functioning system at a management agent;

determining at least one characteristic of the functioning system at the management agent; and

creating the test system description based on the at least one characteristic.

8.   The method of claim 1 wherein the test system descriptions list comprises test system descriptions selected from the group consisting of:

descriptions of fully functioning test systems, descriptions of heterogeneous test systems, descriptions of test systems used to balance a network workload, descriptions of test systems used during specific usage periods, and descriptions of test systems compatible with a particular test.

9.   Computer program product in a computer usable medium for selecting a test system in a distributed network environment, comprising:

means for determining, at a management server, a target test system description, the target test system description associated with a software test;

means for comparing, at the management server, the target test system description to a test system descriptions list;

means for selecting a test system description from the test system descriptions list that matches the target test system description; and

means for contacting a selected test system, the selected test system associated with the selected test system description.

10.   The product of claim 9 further comprising:

means for receiving, at the management server, the software test associated with the target test system description.

11.   The product of claim 10 further comprising:

means for forwarding, from the management server, the software test, to the selected test system; and

means for executing the software test at the selected test system.

12.   The product of claim 9 further comprising:

means for receiving at the management server, a test system description, the test system description associated with a functioning system in the distributed network environment.

13.　　The product of claim 12 further comprising:

　　　　means for comparing the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

14.　　The product of claim 12 further comprising:

　　　　means for adding the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

15.　　The product of claim 12 further comprising:

　　　　means for communicating with the functioning system at a management agent;

　　　　means for determining at least one characteristic of the functioning system at the management agent; and

　　　　means for creating the test system description based on the at least one characteristic.

16.　　A system for selecting a test system in a distributed network environment, comprising:

　　　　means for determining, at a management server, a target test system description, the target test system description associated with a software test;

　　　　means for comparing, at the management server, the target test system description to a test system descriptions list;

　　　　means for selecting a test system description from the test system descriptions list that matches the target test system description; and

　　　　means for contacting a selected test system, the selected test system associated with the selected test system description.

17.   The system of claim 16 further comprising:

means for receiving, at the management server, the software test associated with the target test system description.

means for forwarding, from the management server, the software test, to the selected test system; and

means for executing the software test at the selected test system.

18.   The system of claim 16 further comprising:

means for receiving at the management server, a test system description, the test system description associated with a functioning system in the distributed network environment.

19.   The system of claim 18 further comprising:

means for comparing the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

20.   The system of claim 18 further comprising:

means for adding the test system description to the test system descriptions list.

21.   The system of claim 18 further comprising:

means for communicating with the functioning system at a management agent;

means for determining at least one characteristic of the functioning system at the management agent; and

means for creating the test system description based on the at least one characteristic.